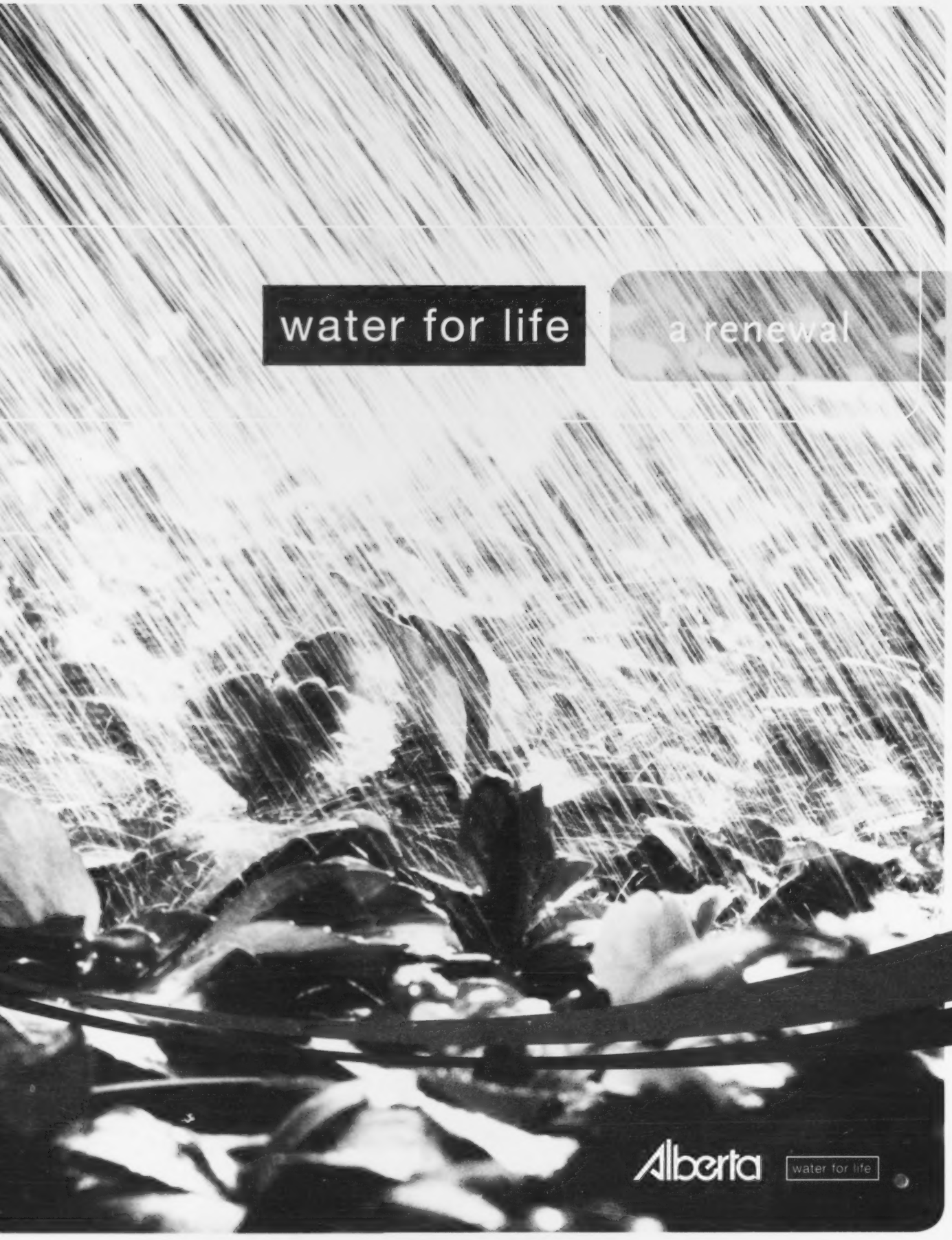
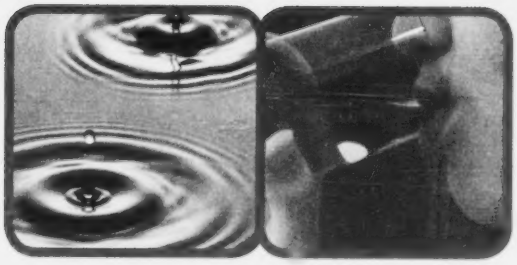

water for life
a renewal
Alberta
water for life



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INTRODUCTION

In Alberta, our quality of life and life itself depends on having a healthy and sustainable water supply for the environment, for our communities and for our economic well-being.

Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability has been the vehicle for managing Alberta's water resources since 2003. In this renewed strategy, the Government of Alberta not only continues to build on the good work already undertaken, but also reaffirms its commitment to the *Water for Life* approach for the wise management of Alberta's water quantity and quality for the benefit of Albertans now and in the future.

"We've learned how passionate and committed Albertans are to finding solutions to water management issues. Not only have we had tremendous support from our Board of Directors and Alternates, we've also had keen interest and participation from volunteers who have put hundreds of hours into a number of standing committees, working groups and project teams looking at a range of complex issues from water allocation to healthy aquatic ecosystems."

Gordon Edwards
Executive Director
Alberta Water Council



Where it all started

Albertans have been managing their water supplies for more than a century. After a multi-year drought at the turn of the millennium, serious concerns were raised about the future of water management in Alberta. The Government of Alberta initiated a public consultation process and listened to Albertans from across the province about their concerns regarding water in Alberta. This process was vital in the development of *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*, which was released in November 2003.

What have we achieved so far?

Since the Government of Alberta began to implement *Water for Life*, there has been significant progress made on a number of key initiatives.

Our understanding and knowledge about water and waterbodies has improved significantly. The creation of the Alberta Water Research Institute will help expand what we know about water in Alberta, and the work done by government has further increased our knowledge.

As our understanding has grown, we have been able to share that information with our partners and Albertans, resulting in safer drinking water across the province. We have also helped establish more partnerships with on-the-ground organizations to help protect Alberta's water. Whether they are stewardship groups, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils or other partners, these groups have become an important element in how we manage water in Alberta.



What has changed since *Water for Life* was released in 2003?

Five years into strategy implementation, growth continues in Alberta's population and economy, the effects of climate change are front of mind and groundwater resources gain importance with limits on surface water allocations in southern Alberta.

Albertans continue to care about the health of the aquatic environment and potential future water shortages, especially in southern Alberta. They are also aware of the potential impact from climate change. They want to be involved in helping to conserve and protect our environment and continue to look for information about Alberta's water resources.

The province continues to see pressures around the rate of growth, particularly in areas of urban, rural and industrial development. Finding the best way to allocate water resources and increasing our understanding of surface and groundwater are priorities for preparing for the future.

Our increased emphasis on working with our partners – the Alberta Water Council, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils and watershed stewardship groups – has proven to be a strong foundation for building local commitment to protecting watersheds and ensuring local sustainability. Continuing to build these organizations is important for long-term sustainability.

Also critical, the *Water for Life* strategy, actions and partners must support efforts under the Land-use Framework.

"With every passing day, the Water for Life initiative is more critical and essential. To me, Water for Life means ensuring comprehensive integration and alignment of economic development, settlement patterns and water management practices. As well, a renewed focus on educating and making Albertans aware of the precarious balance between management practices for today and sustainable development for future generations is essential."

Rick Quail

Municipal Manager
Town of Okotoks
AWC member



Alberta Water Council's recommendations for a renewed *Water for Life* strategy

The Alberta Water Council confirmed the *Water for Life* strategy goals and key directions remain valid; however, "success will depend on focus, innovation, balanced social values and a growing appreciation of the value of water as a scarce resource." In this regard, the Council recommended renewing the strategy around two key themes:

Safeguarding our water sources, including addressing aquatic ecosystem degradation, more fully integrating water and land management, and continuing to create, enhance and use innovative tools and best practices.

The Alberta Water Council also recognized the need to be proactive, **accelerating our actions** to protect our water sources now rather than waiting until later. This includes clarifying roles and accountabilities, improving data collection and analysis, and increasing public awareness about water and water resources to build a shared commitment with Albertans.

The Government of Alberta has accepted the recommendations and incorporated them into this renewed strategy. We also recognize the need to continuously improve and strengthen water policy to ensure sustainability for the future. Integration with other environmental policy will also ensure we are well-prepared to address the challenges of the future.

"Water for Life has given us the opportunity to increase other stakeholders' awareness of the vital benefits that wetlands provide in maintaining healthy watersheds in Alberta. These benefits include improving our water quality, water supplies, and maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems and the rich biodiversity these areas provide."

Dave Kay
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Manager of Provincial Operations



Alberta's water management principles

In addition to working with *Water for Life* partners, the Government of Alberta remains accountable for water management decisions across the province. In order to demonstrate this commitment to Albertans, the Government of Alberta will continue to manage Alberta's water resources using the following management principles:

- All Albertans must recognize there are limits to the available water supply.
- Alberta's water resources must be managed within the capacity of individual watersheds.
- Citizens, communities, industry and government must share responsibility for water management in Alberta and work together to improve conditions within their local watershed.
- Knowledge of Alberta's water supply and quality is the foundation for effective decision-making.
- Albertans must become leaders at using water more effectively and efficiently, and use and reuse water wisely and responsibly.
- Alberta currently recognizes "first-in-time, first-in-right" for existing water allocations, which can be transferable to ensure societal demands and needs can be met.
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems are vital to a high quality of life for Albertans and must be preserved.
- Groundwater and surface water quality must be preserved while pursuing economic and community development.
- Alberta will continue to be a leader in drinking water quality and standards to ensure Albertans have safe, secure drinking water.
- Alberta will administer and operate the water management system to meet transboundary agreements in cooperation with neighbouring jurisdictions.
- The Government of Alberta, along with our partners, will manage Alberta's water infrastructure – both provincial and district-owned – for long-term sustainability.
- Best available practices and market-based tools will be used in order to maintain flexible and adaptive water management.
- Finally, a new principle has been added – *Water for Life* will be integrated into other policies and plans, such as Land-use Framework planning, ensuring better resource management integration.





Safe, secure drinking water supply

Goal: Albertans are assured their drinking water is safe

The Government of Alberta remains committed to assuring quality drinking water for Albertans. Efforts to ensure safe, secure drinking water must recognize our dependence on aquatic ecosystems as source water and the potential requirements of other uses that support our economy.

Specific outcomes include:

- A comprehensive strategy to protect Alberta's drinking water;
- Timely access for all Albertans to information about drinking water quality in their communities; and
- Adherence of Alberta's drinking water infrastructure to emerging standards and management for long-term sustainability.

Key actions include:

- Review and improve the management of small drinking water systems that are currently unregulated;
- Develop innovative approaches to build and assure long-term operational capacity in smaller Alberta communities;
- Design and implement regional drinking water and wastewater solutions; and
- Work cooperatively with First Nations, Métis communities and the federal government to ensure safe drinking water in Aboriginal communities in Alberta.



Healthy aquatic ecosystems

Goal: Albertans are assured that Alberta's aquatic ecosystems are maintained and protected.

Given the effects of growth pressures on Alberta's aquatic environment, an increased focus will be placed on maintaining the value and function of Alberta's aquatic ecosystems. Aquatic ecosystems are Alberta's water source. These aquatic ecosystem functions are required to maintain our ability to support drinking water and economic needs.

Specific outcomes include:

- Protection of aquatic ecosystems in critical areas;
- Establishment of priorities for sustaining aquatic ecosystems to be implemented through watershed plans; and
- Management and allocation of water to sustain aquatic ecosystems and ensure their contribution to Alberta's natural capital and quality of life is maintained.

Key actions include:

- Develop a provincial action plan to improve the health of significantly impacted aquatic ecosystems;
- Set water conservation objectives on all major basins; and
- Finalize and implement a new wetland policy for Alberta.





Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy

Goal: Albertans will be assured that water is managed effectively to support sustainable economic development.

The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that surface and groundwater management, including licence allocation and transfer systems, are relevant and responsive to ensure the wise and long-term conservation of Alberta's water resources.

Specific outcomes include:

- Implementation of a broad range of water management tools;
- Increased awareness for all Albertans of the holistic value of water – as both a part of the economy and improved quality of life;
- Establishment of water management objectives and priorities that support sustainable economic development to be implemented through watershed plans; and
- Management and allocation of water to support sustainable economic development and the strategic priorities of the province.

Key actions include:

- Develop and implement an enhanced surface water rights transfer system that supports sustainable economic development; and
- Develop and implement a viable governance system that supports sustainable management of water.





Knowledge and research

Key Direction: Albertans will have access to the knowledge needed to achieve safe drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

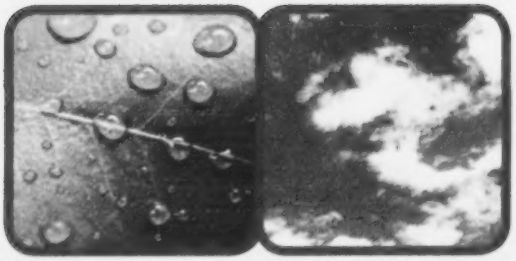
Having comprehensive and robust information and knowledge of our provincial water resources is one of the critical elements in our ability to manage water effectively. A key role for government is to continue to assure Albertans of the quality, quantity and health of Alberta's water resources. Through a renewed *Water for Life* strategy, the Government of Alberta will work with its partners and others to monitor Alberta's water resources and to report on their status.

Specific outcomes include:

- An understanding by *Water for Life* partners of the state of Alberta's drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources;
- Easy access to knowledge and information regarding Alberta's water resources and applicable research to make informed water and related air, land and resource management decisions; and
- Incorporation of education tools and strategies into all *Water for Life* actions.

Key actions include:

- Enhance the provincial water monitoring and evaluation program including information on wetlands, groundwater, aquatic health, water quality, drinking water and water supply; and
- Enhance the Alberta water information centre to provide a web-based public information centre to report on the status of Alberta's water resources.



Partnerships

Key Direction: *Water for Life* partners are empowered, informed and fully engaged in watershed stewardship.

Because the people who are immediately affected by specific water issues can also more directly and effectively find solutions to address them, *Water for Life* is a shared responsibility through a network of partnerships, use of outcome-based approaches, and collaboration in delivery of services. The *Water for Life* partnerships are an important vehicle through which *Water for Life* goals are achieved.

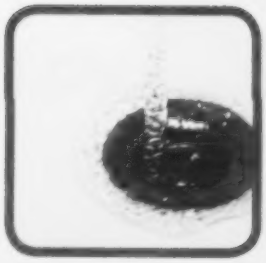
The Government of Alberta remains committed to ensuring these partnerships are resourced and have the scientific information required to fulfill their mandates. The Government of Alberta in turn accepts its responsibility to show leadership, provide assurance, and carry-out compliance roles as a partner in *Water for Life*. The Government of Alberta also remains committed to ensure Alberta's interests are well represented.

Specific outcomes include:

- Timely and strategic advice given to governments, industry and non-government organizations by the Alberta Water Council;
- Maintaining Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils as leaders in watershed assessment and planning; and
- Continued work by watershed stewardship groups to take community-level action to safeguard Alberta's water resources.

Key actions include:

- Continue to resource and support *Water for Life* partnerships; and
- Continue to develop and improve watershed management knowledge, tools and programs.



Water conservation

Key Direction: All sectors understand how their behaviours impact water quality, quantity and the health of aquatic ecosystems, adopt a "water conservation ethic" and take action.

Over the past 100 years, water has been withdrawn from Alberta's rivers, lakes and aquifers and used for a variety of human purposes. Within each watershed, a limited amount of water can be withdrawn while still maintaining a healthy aquatic ecosystem. Fluctuating water supplies has created the need to shift how we use and allocate this renewable, but scarce, resource.

The solution to emerging water challenges comes through a combination of both improving our ability to capture and store water during high flow periods and improving water use practices through significant conservation, efficiency and productivity efforts. Water conservation, combined with a focus on getting the most production possible from the water already allocated, is a fundamental component of any provincial water strategy.

Albertans want to know what they can do to improve water quality, quantity and the health of aquatic ecosystems. The Government of Alberta will expand the use of education as a strategy for influencing and helping Albertans make personal and public decisions regarding Alberta's water resources. Our efforts will include enhancing public awareness, enabling environmental stewardship and innovation, supporting educators and engaging youth.

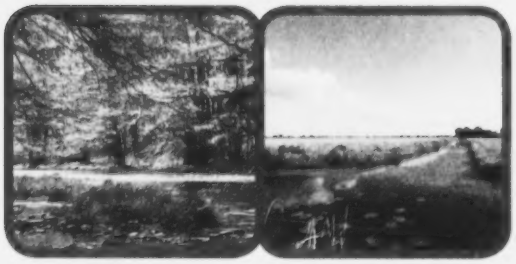
Specific outcomes include:

- Demonstration in all sectors of best management practices, ensuring overall efficiency and productivity of water use in Alberta improves by 30 per cent from 2005 levels by 2015. This will occur when either:
  - Demand for water is reduced; or
  - Water use efficiency and productivity are increased.

Key actions include:

- Complete an evaluation and make recommendations on the merit of economic instruments to meet water conservation and productivity objectives; and
- Encourage all sectors to develop and implement sector plans for water conservation, efficiency and productivity.





A ROADMAP FOR ACTION

This strategy outlines the goals and objectives required to protect Alberta's water resources. For the strategy to be successful, a number of key actions need to be undertaken by government. These actions, which include a more thorough examination and analysis of current policies to enhance our ability to monitor, analyze and share water data and continue to build partnerships, will be outlined in the *Water for Life* action plan, which is coming early 2009.

The Government of Alberta will also commit to report annually on its progress on commitments outlined in the action plan. Equally, all *Water for Life* partners are encouraged to report on their progress relative to their actions and participation. This information will support the Alberta Water Council's role to provide advice on any new direction and focus upon completion of the short-term implementation schedule.

"I am continuously learning about and impressed by the depth and breadth of community stewardship groups and all the great on-the-ground work they do to improve their local waterbodies and watersheds! Individual and community stewardship is and will continue to be a major contributor to the achievement of Water for Life outcomes."

Sarah Hipkin
Watershed Stewardship Grant Program Coordinator
Alberta Stewardship Network



MEASURING SUCCESS

When *Water for Life* was first released, it identified a number of performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the strategy. These measures were further expanded in the October 2005 *Report on Implementation Progress of Water for Life*.

Learning from the past five years, it is again a good opportunity to review existing performance measures to determine if they are still valid and if new measures need to be added. The Government of Alberta will do this in conjunction with the Alberta Water Council when reporting annually on water strategy implementation.

"The water renewal is an opportunity to realign our course into the future, we need to engage and support our leaders in doing so."

Kirk Popik
Mayor of Calmar



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